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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000181

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, DRL/CRA

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01-30-14

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PINR](#) [MV](#)

SUBJECT: New Maldivian Human Rights Commission:  
Opportunity for USG promotion of human rights

Refs: (A) Colombo - SA/INS 01/30/04 unclass e-mail  
- (B) Colombo 164, and previous

(U) Classified by Bruce Lohof, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a recent trip to Male', PAO met with Ahmed Mujuthaba, the Chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives. Mujuthaba said he wanted the newly formed Commission to help the democratization process in the Maldives, and later provided PAO a copy of the Commission's rules and regulations. The formation of the Commission is an important event for the Maldives and Mission is reviewing how we might help it build capacity. We would appreciate Department's views on possible sources of funding. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) MEETING THE CHAIRMAN OF NEW COMMISSION: PAO met with Ahmed Mujuthaba, the Chairman of the newly formed Human Rights Commission of the Maldives, on January 20 in Male'. Mujuthaba reviewed the rules and regulations that govern the newly formed Commission, specifically noting its responsibilities and the cases that would come under its purview. Mujuthaba noted that he was in the process of translating the "Regulations of the Human Rights Commission of the Maldives" from Dhivehi (the language of the Maldives) into English. He predicted that a rough translation would be completed shortly, and offered to share it with Mission. (Note: As translated by Mujuthaba's office, a text of the rules and regulations are contained in Ref A. The document states, in part, that the main objective of the Commission is "to protect, preserve, and promote human rights in the Maldives in accordance with Islamic jurisprudence and the Constitution of the Maldives." In their details, the regulations also state that, following a decision by the Commission on a case, it can send the case to the Attorney General's Office for possible prosecution, among other options for legal redress.)

13. (C) Throughout the meeting, Mujuthaba repeatedly emphasized the need for a democratizing influence in the Maldives, as well as highlighting the role the Commission might play in that effort. Mujuthaba said the group's primary focus in the short term would be the hearing of complaints brought by citizens. He noted that the Commission's mandate only extended to events that occurred after its formation on December 10, 2003.

14. (C) PAO congratulated the Commission on its recent receipt of a UNDP grant. Mujuthaba said the funds would be well used but that more funding would be welcome. Commission activities would be expensive, he said, and he hoped that he could attract a broad base of funding that would permit the Commission to keep the government at a distance. Mujuthaba expressed his desire that the Commission could become "woven in" to the international human rights community. Through this, he thought the Commission could learn to do its work more effectively, as well as taking on a mantle of international legitimacy. Wrapping up, Mujuthaba noted that one of the impediments to human rights work in the Maldives was that a majority of the citizens were not aware of their rights as citizens of the Maldives. On this point, he recalled that he had approached newspaper publishers to ascertain whether they would be interested in publishing a supplement that set out the Commission's mandate and educated readers on what human rights they were accorded by the Maldivian Constitution. Mujuthaba said the publishers had declined, saying it would be too expensive.

15. (C) FURTHER BACKGROUND ON THE COMMISSION: The Maldivian Human Rights Commission was formed in December 2003, following the September riots in the capital of Male' sparked by a serious outbreak of prison violence on a nearby island. President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom announced the formation of the Commission in his inaugural address for his latest term in office (he's been in power 25 years) given on November 11, 2003. In

announcing that the Commission would be formed, Gayoom averred that its purpose would be to "safeguard the civil liberties enshrined in the Constitution of the Maldives, and protect and promote human rights in the country." In his speech, Gayoom also announced that the government would make additional moves toward democratization, but did not describe them.

16. (C) COMMENT: The formation of the Commission is an important event for the Maldives, which -- in the aftermath of the September riots -- is beginning to tentatively grapple with the issues of human rights and democratization. In a carefully calibrated way, we believe that the USG can help this sensitive process. The formation of the Human Rights Commission provides an excellent opportunity for such assistance, and we are reviewing how we might help it build capacity. In doing this, we would appreciate Department's views on possible sources of funding, including through ESF. Mujuthaba, a former minister and MP with a reputation for independence, is a close Mission contact. The Commission's Secretary General, Rashida Ali, is also an excellent contact, and has participated in an International Visitor Program to the U.S. END COMMENT.

17. (U) Minimize considered.

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